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ABSTRACT

In this article, the author describes her experience teaching English as a second language to kindergarten children of varied language backgrounds. Teaching activities, classroom procedures, and materials are discussed. The basic objective of the program is to increase the children's English vocabulary and to provide cultural education. Ideas for neighborhood field trips are included. (VM)

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VOLUNTEER - TEACHING ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

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This semester I was assigned as a volunteer to work at P.S. 13 in Queens in the English as a Second Language Program. The program is supervised by Miss Jeanne Linden, a remarkably dedicated teacher. Miss Linden is assisted by several parent-aides during the week and also by myself on Fridays. Since my specialty is early childhood I work with several groups of kindergarten children each week. I have five groups, each with approximately seven children, and I spend fifty minutes with each group. Miss Linden is extremely cooperative and works conscientiously with the parent-aides in order to follow-up the units I begin on Fridays. Unfortunately, I was not assigned to the school until March 19th and since then two weeks were lost due to the Easter vacation. However, every little bit that can be done for these children is tremendously beneficial.

The ESL program at P.S. 13 is state-funded and thus receives a wealth of visual and listening material. Miss Linden is a very generous supervisor and constantly offers new materials and suggestions for the program.

The children involved in this program are newly-arrived immigrants from numerous foreign countries, including Japan, Burma, Greece, Ecuador, Puerto Rico, Haiti, and several others. Since most of the children arrived in this country this year, the basic objective of the program is to increase their English vocabulary and to familiarize them with our culture so that school will become a relatively comfortable situation.

In addition to the materials available at P.S. 13, I use a set of home-made flash cards for development of a basic vocabulary and for practice in listening to the sounds of the English language. The set includes cards

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for teaching initial consonant sounds, colors, parts of the body, animals, articles of clothing, and other useful items. I try to get the children into the habit of speaking in sentences and after each child speaks I repeat his sentence for reinforcement.

Miss Linden and I both feel that experience is the best teacher and we have planned the units for the children accordingly. The first unit was about the zoo. For this I used the program's beautiful collection of animal visual aids. The children absolutely adored these pictures and are now able to identify many animals found at the zoo.

When I teach the naming of things, I use this pattern: "What's this? This is a lion." I feel that children should hear the flow of the words as it generally occurs in speech so that they will be able to speak and understand English in its natural form..I try to speak in as natural a tone and rate of speed as possible.

Five year old children have incredibly short attention spans so I try to include several activities in each lesson. For example, we begin with our greetings: "My name is Miss Katcher. What's your name?" "My name is Maria." "Good morning, Maria." "Good morning, Miss Katcher." "How are you today, Maria?" "I'm fine, thank you." With dialogues such as this the round robin technique of allowing each child to ask the questions works beautifully. We then practice awhile with vocabulary and sound flash cards. Next we have a "discussion" about the animal pictures I mentioned. After our discussion the children practice listening to a record about the sounds that zoo animals make and are then given an opportunity to act out the role of the animal of their choice. Finally, they can color a rexograph of their favorite animal. This unit on the zoo provided several opportunities to learn various concepts such as number - one tiger, two monkeys, three giraffes, etc. We also considered significant features of each animal - the stripes of a tiger or zebra, an elephant's trunk, a camel's hump, the long neck of a giraffe, and the long tail of monkey.

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The more English the children hear and the more they are allowed to use, the quicker they will acquire fluency. And young children are amazingly flexible. After one year in school they are generally quite fluent.

During the week the parent-aides continued the unit on the zoo. Miss Linden provided interesting stories and poems to be read to the children about the zoo. Also, visual aids were used constantly.

Our next unit was naturally the circus. Visual aids, stories, poems, a party with peanuts, popcorn, and crackerjacks, pictures of clowns to be colored, were all incorporated into the lessons.

Last week, however, was the highlight of my experience at P.S. 13. At Miss Linden's suggestion, I decided to take the children for a walk to the neighborhood supermarket. I combined groups because this was to be an entire morning affair. I was accompanied by another aide and the ten children who remembered to bring back their parent consent forms.

I was amazed that the children did not get bored at all since we were out of the school for more than an hour and then continued our lesson in school with a fruit party. The walk itself provided a great number of learning experiances, from talking about a garbage can, a fire hydrant and a mailman to learning about crossing the street. Once inside the supermarket, the children were in heaven. Everything interested them, from toys to chicken. Finally, we got to the fruit counter, spoke about the various fruits on display and then picked out the fruit we wanted to buy. When we were leaving the store, Spiros asked me for "one cent for candy" so each child had his turn to buy a piece of gum from the machine. On the way back to school we noticed several different dogs. Naturally the children were very excited and I therefore decided that we will take a walk to the neighborhood pet shop next week.

This week the parent-aides will follow-up our supermarket trip and

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fruit party with a planting project. They will use the seeds I kept from the various fruits we ate.

My experience at P.S. 13 has been a delightful one. Miss Linden could not have been more cooperative and the children's progress has been quite rewarding. However, the school desperately needs more experienced ESL teachers. One is certainly not enough! Also, Miss Linden explained that if there are budgetary cuts, the ESL program will be the first to go. This problem exists in varying degrees throughout the city and the children are always the losers. I feel very strongly that the needs of these immigrant children must be recognized and that they must be allowed to get the education they deserve.

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